

## D. Interpret According to Context – Part 2

### a. Introductory Thoughts

1. Having considered the immediate context, context of book and Bible there are two more key areas that are crucial to accurate Bible interpretation. These are the Historical and Cultural context.
  - a) The Bible is an ancient book, written by ancient people, written to ancient people, written with regard to ancient things.
  - b) The Bible is a cultural book, written by cultural people, written throughout several cultures, written to people of different cultures.
2. It is impossible to have a proper understanding of Bible interpretation without having a proper understanding of the Historical and Cultural context in which it was written.
  - a) The Bible should be interpreted in the ancient culture in which it was written and only then can it be properly applied to the culture of the interpreter.
  - b) The Bible comes to life when considering the various aspects of Historical and Cultural context from: greetings, transportation, weddings, funerals, business practices, family affairs, clothing, food, politics, and weights and measures and countless more.

### b. \_\_\_\_\_ Context

1. The Bible records human history roughly spanning about 4,000 years. Even human history over the last 200 to 300 years requires attention to historical context, therefore how much more the Bible. Therefore we must consider the Bible in light of its ancient historical context.

#### Consider the following examples:

- a) **Time:** A day began from 6a.m. and finished at 6p.m.
  1. Third hour, 9am – Acts 2:15
  2. Sixth hour, 12 noon – Matt. 20:5; 27:45
  3. Ninth hour, 3pm – Matt. 27:46
  4. Eleventh hour, 5pm – Matt. 20:6
- b) **Jewish Calendar**
  1. A Jewish year is calculated at 360 days.
  2. This is essential for interpreting Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. Dan. 9:27; Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6,14; 13:5
  3. It will be helpful to become familiar with a Jewish calendar and the months and feasts connected with those months.
- c) **Weights and Measures:** The height of Goliath and the weight of his armour are referred to in 1 Samuel 17:4-7.
  1. **Goliath's Height (v4)** – "...whose height was six cubits and a span."
    1. One cubit = 18 inches = 45cm
    2. One span =  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cubit = 9inches = 22cm
    3. Goliaths height = 292cm or 9.6ft

\*\* Some cubits varied between 17 – 20 inches. It is the measure from the elbow to the tip of the tallest finger.

**2. Goliaths Armour Weight** (v5-7) – “and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass... and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron...”

1. 55 shekels = 1 K.G.
2. Coat of mail = 90 K.G.
3. Spears head = 10 K.G.

**3. Noah's Ark – Genesis 6:14-16**

1. L300 Cubits, W30 Cubits, H50 Cubits
2. 137m long, 23 meters wide, 14 meters high

**4. Other Important weights and measures**

1. 1 Talent = 55k.g.
2. 1 Penny = 15c, (wage for a day labourer)
3. Handbreadth = width of 4fingers, roughly 7.4cm
2. A Day's Journey = 32 to 40kms

c. **Context**

1. The Bible records not only a vast span of human history but it also was written in the context of different cultures.
2. The main Bible culture to be considered is the Jewish culture. The other nations considered in the Bible cover only very select areas of Scripture.
3. To understand the culture of the Bible the student of God's Word must consider from time to time the Manners and Customs of the day in which the Bible was written.

**Consider the following examples:**

a) **The Rooftop:**

1. Houses in the Bible times had flat roofs. People would often spend time on the rooftop. It was a place for worship (Zeph. 1:5; Jer. 32:29) and prayer, Peter is seen praying on the housetop (Acts 10:9).

The feast of Tabernacles (booths) was a time to remember how that God led the Israelites through the wilderness as they were wandering living in tents. In Nehemiah 8:16 we see that they celebrating the feast of tabernacles set them up upon the rooftops.

In Deuteronomy 22:8 contained a law for building battlement (railing) upon the rooftop lest someone falls off and dies because of your negligence to build. In Mark 2:4 they let the lame man through the roof practically digging up the rooftop.

2. In Proverb 21:9 "**It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top than with a brawling woman in a wide house.**"

1. The housetop is not the most comfortable of places to live. To live on the rooftop you would be exposed to the rain, wind, and the cold. However, it's still better than living with a brawling woman in a wide house.
2. William Macdonald: "Houses in Bible lands had flat roofs. This proverb says that it would be better to live alone in a cramped corner of one of those roofs, exposed to heat, cold, rain, snow, wind, and hail, than to live in a house shared with a nagging, cantankerous woman. The storms from without would be more endurable than the tempest inside."

b) **Greetings:** "**Salute one another with a holy kiss.**" Romans 16:16

1. The kiss on the cheek was a common form of greeting and it displayed an expression of friendship, and mutual brotherly love. Men kissed the men and woman the woman. Still common today.

c) **The Chief Shepherd:** "**When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.**"

1. In Hebrews 13:20 Jesus is called "that great Shepherd of the sheep." Where the flocks were many there would be a need for more shepherds. There were often several shepherds looking after a large flock. When that would occur one was placed in charge of all the others.
2. Here is the lesson: "Christian ministers are pastors or shepherds; but there is one over them all. Jesus is the "chief Shepherd." He superintends them, cares for them, and assigns them their several positions and rewards or punishes them."

d) **Foot Washing:** "...he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet..." John 13:5

1. One of the first things people would do on arrival to a friend or family member's house is to wash their feet. The Jewish people only wore sandals and due to the dusty roads people's feet needed regular washing. In the ordinary household the host would provide water and the guests would wash their own feet. However in the richer households the washing was done by a slave. Foot washing was looked upon as the lowliest of all services.

e) **Wine Mingled with Myrrh:** "**And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.**" Mark 15:23

1. Wine mingled with myrrh was a narcotic drink used to decrease sensitivity to pain. The Romans allowed victims of crucifixion to drink this narcotic. It was usually provided by the pious

women of Jerusalem who would extend a hand of mercy to these criminals. Jesus refused to drink it; He was determined to bear man's sins in His full consciousness taking not short cuts or an easy way out.

**Homework:**

- Reading and Quotations: Bible Explorers Guide, J. Phillips – Part 1 – Ch. 12 – 13
- Interpret Luke 22:36 – Why did Jesus tell his disciples to buy a sword? Is Jesus suggesting that we are to carry weapons? How does this passage reconcile with Matt. 5:44; Matt. 5:39; Matt. 26:52; John 18:36. Give an answer that is supported by the context and in harmony with the rest of Scripture.